

Aldo Leopold's "January Thaw"
From *A Sand County Almanac*

Developed by Brittany Roberts, lead teacher at
Northern Waters Environmental School in Hayward, WI.
Used with grades 6-8 (may be adapted)

Materials/Equipment

- Copies of the essay *January Thaw* for each student
- Paper (one sheet regular sized sheet for each student)
- Paper (one larger sized sheet for each vocabulary group)
- Colored pencils, crayons, or markers
- Bed sheet with animal tracks printed on it

Anticipatory Set

- Introduce the lesson by laying out a sheet with animal tracks on it.
- Students will look at the tracks and decide what happened to the animals in order that they would make tracks like that.
- Have students share their interpretation of the tracks.
- Introduce Aldo Leopold and *A Sand County Almanac*
- Tell students that Aldo Leopold wrote an essay based on the tracks and signs of animals that he observed, called *January Thaw*.

Teacher Input

- Distribute a copy of the essay *January Thaw* to each of the students.
- Explain to the students that in Leopold's novel *A Sand County Almanac*, he has an essay that corresponds with each month of the year and that you will be reading the essay on January today.
- Tell the students to pay special attention to the language that Leopold uses and highlight or circle any words that they do not know the meaning of.

Guided Practice

- Have the students take turns reading *January Thaw*. Reading these essays aloud helps with visualization.
- When finished with reading, have the students share any of the words that they circled or highlighted.

Record those words on the board.

Here are some words that students may choose:

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|---------------|----------------|--------------|
| 1. mundane | 4. laboriously | 7. bespeak |
| 2. digression | 5. microtine | 8. impute |
| 3. speculate | 6. mottled | 9. corpulent |

- Break the students up into enough groups. (A word for each group.)
- Give each group a large sheet of paper and have them list their word at the top, draw an illustration of the word in the middle, and write the definition in their own words at the bottom of the page.
- Have each group share their word with the rest of the class.

Independent Practice/ Developmental Activity

- Pass out a sheet of paper to each student and have them draw a scene from the essay that they could clearly picture as we were reading.

Closure

- Have students put away their colored pencils and come back together for discussion.
- Ask for volunteers to show their illustration.
- Have the other students guess what part of the essay was drawn.
- Why is it important for authors to use descriptive language?
- On page 4, why didn't Aldo Leopold write "the mouse ran across the track" instead of "darted dantly across the skunk track?"
- Write on the board: "The moose walked through the woods."
- Ask the students to think of a way to say this so that the reader could get more of a picture in their mind.
- Tell the students that for the next class period, they are to write a description of an animal NOT mentioned in the book and how they are affected by the January thaw.
- Inform the students that their peers as well as myself should be able to read the description that they will write and picture in our minds what the animal is doing.

Lesson Extensions

Possible extensions for this lesson include:

- Take students outside to spot and identify tracks. Have students identify the animal's four basic needs (food, water, space, shelter) and where they might find these things nearby.
- Have students explore the measurement differences between the tracks. (ex: does a wolf or a coyote have a larger track)
- Talk about visualization and vivid language. Have students practice writing using vivid language. Students might try to draw what other students had written about.